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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001519

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: UNEASY CALM AS WAR ANNIVERSARY COMES AND GOES

REF: A. TBILISI 1427  
[B](#). TBILISI 1407  
[C](#). TBILISI 1358

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. August 5 and 6 were uneasily calm after several days of incidents and allegations, followed by five Georgians being kidnapped and returned unharmed on August 7. On August 3, Georgian and South Ossetian forces traded allegations of an attack near Plavismani and Otrevi, and on August 4 a teenager was injured by an explosive device in the nearby town of Tkviavi. The EUMM increased its risk assessment along the administrative boundaries to high, and on August 1 the EUMM began running patrols around the clock to deter incidents and increase their own visibility. Both the EUMM and EU issued statements calling for restraint on all sides. Nevertheless the EUMM has seen no indications of heightened activity or alert by Georgian forces, including along the boundaries; the one exception is increased security at such sensitive installations as bridges and railroads. End summary.

CALM, BUT TENSE

[1](#)2. (SBU) After a series of incidents between July 22 and August 4 (reftels), the last couple days have seen fewer incidents. Georgia, Russia, and the de facto regimes have continued to trade public accusations of intentions to undertake provocations and escalate the situation, however. On August 6, for example, Georgian Foreign Ministry released a statement criticizing Russian government statements as a "disinformation campaign" consisting of "distorted facts, demagoguery and blatant lies," and the atmosphere remains tense, especially along the administrative boundaries. In its August 6 weekly briefing for diplomatic colleagues, Deputy Head of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) Gilles Janvier said that the EUMM raised its risk assessment for the areas along the boundaries to "high," the highest of three levels. The EUMM also implemented round-the-clock patrolling on August 1 in an effort to deter incidents and increase its visibility. Following its August 1 press release calling for restraint in the midst of recent incidents, the EUMM released another one August 6 noting the establishment of relative calm, but again calling for restraint.

[1](#)3. (C) On August 3 the Swedish presidency of the EU released a similar statement noting recent accusations of attacks and calling on both sides to show restraint. The statement was careful to note that the EUMM had "seen no evidence so far to confirm mutual accusations of shellings." In the August 6 briefing, however, EUMM officials noted that one of its patrols had heard the explosions that Georgian officials said were directed at the Georgian checkpoint in Plavismani the evening of August 3 (a few hours before the EU statement was released). South Ossetian de facto authorities accused Georgian forces of firing mortars at their positions in

Otrevi, just across the boundary. On August 4, however, EUMM monitors returned during daylight to search the area, but could find no physical evidence of the attack. (They were unable to access the South Ossetian side of the boundary.) In a separate conversation, EUMM Political Advisor Rosaria Puglisi (please protect) said that in that location, the Georgian checkpoint is at the bottom of a hill, a South Ossetian position is at the top of the hill, and a Russian position is at the bottom on the far side. According to Puglisi, it seemed to the EUMM monitors that some explosions were first directed from the top of the hill toward the Georgian position, then others were directed from the top of the hill toward the Russian position. Georgian press reported that local villagers made similar allegations of South Ossetian forces firing at both Georgian and Russian positions in an effort to provoke a direct Georgia-Russia clash.

¶4. (SBU) The most recent significant incidents along the South Ossetian boundary occurred on August 4 and August 7. On August 4 a 14-year-old boy was injured by an explosive device in a tree just outside Plavi, on the road toward Tkviavi (on undisputed Georgian territory). EUMM arrived at the scene shortly after the explosion incident, and reported that the device was a booby trap consisting of an RPG-7 connected to a detonator. Janvier said the exact location of the IED, in a tree that was uprooted in a very recent storm, suggested that it could only have been placed since the storm. Some observers speculated that the attacks of August 3, which occurred nearby, could have been designed as a diversion in order to enable the placement of the device. On August 7, five Georgian shepherds from the village of Koshka

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were abducted and returned hours later unharmed. According to the EUMM, the shepherds were kidnapped by three S. Ossetians. There are conflicting reports, however, to the identity of the Ossetians. The EUMM heard first that the abductors were uniformed, and later that the kidnappers were not uniformed but were just civilian S. Ossetians involved in some kind of criminal activity. When news of the kidnapping reached EUMM they activated the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism hotline. Russian forces got involved, and the villagers were released by about 2230 that evening.

NO SIGNIFICANT HEIGHTENED ALERT OR TROOP MOVEMENTS

¶5. (SBU) At the August 6 briefing, Janvier said that the EUMM had detected no evidence of a state of heightened alert by Georgian forces. The number of forces along the administrative boundaries remains the same, for example, and the forces on duty have not changed their stance in any way. The one exception is that the EUMM observed an increase in security at the most sensitive infrastructure facilities, such as railways and bridges. Also, the EUMM continues to undertake unannounced inspections of Ministry of Internal Affairs facilities, and has found no mortars in these inspections. The EUMM has not seen any evidence or heard any reports of unmanned aerial vehicles in recent days either. Although South Ossetian de facto "president" Eduard Kokoity was quoted in the press as saying that he would seal the boundary of the Akhlagori Valley, Janvier reported that EUMM monitors had not seen evidence of any additional restrictions on movements in and out of Akhlagori.

TEFFT